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Hearing pries into secret court

By Tony Mauro
USA TODAY

A federal appeals court in Pasadena, Calif., today hears public arguments on a very private subject — the legality of the USA's only secret court.

The hearing should shed some light on the federal Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, which has never met in public and never will.

The court rules on Justice Department requests to wiretap U.S. citizens and foreign na-

tionals suspected of espionage and terrorism activities.

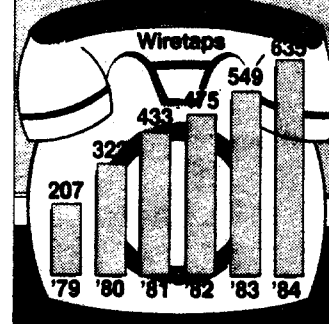
The court meets in a drab, "bugproof" room on the sixth floor of the Justice Department in Washington, D.C.

Today's hearing concerns Thomas Cavanagh, an engineer at Northrop Corp. who got a life sentence last May for trying to sell "Stealth" bomber secrets to the Soviets.

Cavanagh's lawyers claim the secret operations violated Cavanagh's constitutional right against unreasonable searches.

Legal wiretaps on the rise

Increase in the number of wiretaps granted by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court since it began operations in 1979.



By Heidi E. Capousis, USA TODAY

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